



Ethel Grandin

Also Known As:
Mrs. Ray Smallwood

Lived:
March 3, 1894 - September 7, 1988

Worked as:
film actress, film company founding partner, producer, theatre actress

Worked In:
United States

by **Kaveh Askari**

With the success of *Traffic in Souls* (1913), the fan and trade press recognized Ethel Grandin as a leading star of Carl Laemmle's Independent Motion Picture (IMP) Company. The subsequent articles on Grandin tell the story of her early career, citing her family history on the New York stage as well as her debut at age six with Joseph Jefferson in "Rip Van Winkle." Shortly before acting in films, she performed in Chauncey Olcott's theatre company alongside [Mary Pickford](#)'s sister Lottie. Grandin's association with the Pickford family prompted her to enter the film industry soon after Mary did. A 1914 article in the *Green Book Magazine* notes several parallels between Pickford and Grandin—from physical appearance to career trajectory—and suggests that Grandin "stepped into little Mary's shoes" at IMP in 1911 (256–257).

When Thomas Ince, then a director at IMP, left New York for California in 1911, he took Grandin with him as his lead actress and Ray Smallwood as his cinematographer. Smallwood and Grandin married the following year and worked together on many productions throughout her career. In California, Grandin starred in the Bison 101 Ranch films, created to satisfy increasing demand for images of the Western landscape. A full page article in the *Moving Picture World* praises Grandin and Ince's first California production, *War on the Plains* (1912), for landscapes "sublime in their grandeur" (298). The success of the Bison films renewed Carl Laemmle's interest in Grandin and Smallwood, and he requested that they return to IMP in New York. A 1913 article in *Moving Picture World* noted a combination of personal and professional reasons for their return, suggesting that Grandin agreed to move back primarily to be closer to her ailing mother (1237). Grandin, several months' pregnant at the time of the move, began working for Laemmle soon after the birth of her son. Her work from this second period at IMP was by and large comprised of

one- and two-reel comedies, although the six-reel feature film *Traffic in Souls* received more publicity than any of these shorts.

Hoping to capitalize on some of her recent celebrity, Grandin and Smallwood formed the Grandin Films label out of the Smallwood Film Corporation, which was founded by Ray's brother, Arthur Smallwood, in 1913. One could say that the couple followed the lead of [Marion Leonard](#) and her husband Stanner E. V. Taylor, who started Gem Motion Picture Company in 1911, and indeed, one of Grandin's earliest roles was in the extant Gem production, *The Bachelor Girl's Club* (1913).

Grandin's level of involvement in establishing the company is not entirely clear, but the legal documents in the George Kleine Collection do name her as a partner in these ventures along with Ray and Arthur Smallwood. In June 1914, the *Moving Picture World* announced Grandin and Smallwood's departure from Universal, into which IMP was absorbed in 1912 (1706). The new production company, however, was not mentioned in *Moving Picture World* until December 1914 (1538).

In an unpublished interview in 1975, Grandin described how in the summer of 1914 they had begun shooting films under the glass ceiling of a converted Turkish bath in midtown Manhattan. The *Moving Picture World* profile of Grandin, published in December of the same year, announced weekly releases beginning with *The Adopted Daughter* (1914). Grandin and Smallwood began production on several one-reel dramatic films under the Grandin Films label, but they ran into financial trouble before their company even made it off the ground. The trade papers provide a few clues as to why their company floundered. In her *Green Book Magazine* interview of 1914, Grandin predicts the return of the one-reel film: "The public doesn't like the five- and six-reel story nearly as well as the concentrated short-length pictures that were produced three years ago.... The future of the motion picture lies in the good, meaty one-reel picture" (257). Producing mainly short subjects, Grandin Films could not adjust to the market for features. Since feature production far exceeded the company's resources, Grandin's support for the one-reeler may have been her way of making a virtue out of necessity.

In an attempt to save their filmmaking operation, Grandin and Smallwood signed a contract with Chicago film importer George Kleine for exclusive rights to their films. They would provide a regular supply of films, Kleine would hold copyright in his name, and the General Film Company, distribution arm of the Motion Picture Patents Company, would distribute and promote the films. By August 1915, the *Moving Picture World* announced that Smallwood was to direct "a long list" of films written specifically for Grandin (983). This second venture, too, quickly collapsed. The Kleine papers at the Library of Congress detail how this business relationship deteriorated into bitter litigation. From reading the Smallwood case file, one gets the impression that Kleine's initial pleasure with the terms of his agreement with Grandin and Smallwood soured after he was forced to continually advance them money to finish the films that they had agreed to produce on their own.

Moreover, Grandin and Ray Smallwood had left brother Arthur Smallwood out of their deal with Kleine. When Arthur filed an injunction against the release of the films produced under this new

agreement, Kleine withdrew the Grandin films from circulation. Grandin and Smallwood quickly filed suit against Kleine for damages. The fact that Kleine had a stronger case led him to speculate on why Grandin and Smallwood filed suit against him. Kleine claims, at the end of his narrative of their dealings written for his attorneys, that one of Grandin's directors in 1915 tipped her off to a recent settlement offered by Kleine simply to avoid litigation. He says of Grandin and Smallwood in November of 1916, "[I] am inclined to believe that this suit is a blackmailing scheme based upon the assumption that I would rather compromise than fight and not upon the merits of their claim" (13). Kleine partly implicates Grandin here, but he suggests that the main blame lies with Smallwood. In the introduction to the letter, Kleine describes Grandin as "a hard working actress" who went along with Smallwood's "will to be a trickster within his limited mental capacity" (2). Another interpretation of the legal files and Kleine's deposition is made by Karen Mahar who understands the brothers as unscrupulous in their business dealings and as having taken advantage of Grandin's stardom, and Kleine as seeing the actress as a victim (Mahar 2006, 73-74).

After her production business fell apart, Grandin took few acting jobs, but *Moving Picture World* notes in 1916 that she is to be featured in the independently produced *The Crimson Stain Mystery* (1529). Subsequently, *Photoplay* announced what they saw as her "comeback" early in 1917 with *The Crimson Stain Mystery*, a fifteen-part serial, of which thirteen chapters are extant (137). This crime serial, which also featured former Vitagraph star Maurice Costello, did garner enough publicity to revive her career, but from her credits it appears that she remained in partial retirement. After a few more films for S-L Productions (an independent, short-lived company) in the early 1920s, she retired completely. Since Grandin retired in her late twenties and died at ninety-four, she had at least sixty years to consider her career, and even to organize her papers, which have been deposited at the University of Wyoming.

See also: [Marion Leonard](#), [Mary Pickford](#)

Bibliography

Bell, James. "Maurice Comes Back; So Does Ethel: Once Popular Stars Return to Film Fold to Regain Fame." *Photoplay* 11 (Jan. 1917): 136-137.

"Ethel Grandin." *Moving Picture World* (6 Dec. 1913): 1127.

"Ethel Grandin." *Moving Picture World* (12 Dec. 1914): 1538.

"Ethel Grandin Returns to Films." *Moving Picture World* (11 June 1921): 629.

"George Kleine Engages New Director." *Moving Picture World* (7 Aug. 1915): 983.

Grandin, Ethel. Unpublished interview (10 Sept. 1975). Anthony Slide Collection. Bowling Green State University Libraries.

Katterjohn, Monte. "A Film Star at Twenty." *Green Book Magazine* (Aug. 1914): 255-258.

MacDonald, Margaret. "The Crimson Stain Mystery." *Moving Picture World* (2 Sept. 1916): 1529.

Mahar, Karen Ward. *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006.

"Old Production That Cost \$5,000 Amassed \$475,000" *New York Times* (31 May 1925): 2.

"Smallwood and Grandin Leave Universal." *Moving Picture World* (20 June 1914): 1706.

"The Smallwoods in New York." *Moving Picture World* (12 June 1913): 1237.

"War on the Plains." Rev. *Moving Picture World* (27 Jan. 1912): 298.

Archival Paper Collections:

Anthony Slide Collection. [Bowling Green State University Libraries](#).

Ethel Grandin clippings file. [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences](#), [Margaret Herrick Library](#).

Ethel Grandin clippings file. Robinson Locke Collection. [New York Public Library](#), [Billy Rose Theatre Division](#).

Ethel Grandin papers, 1914-1971. [University of Wyoming](#), [American Heritage Center](#).

George Kleine papers, 1886-1946. [Library of Congress](#), [Manuscript Division](#).

Filmography

A. Archival Filmography: Extant Film Titles:

1. Ethel Grandin as Actress

Behind the Times. Dir.: Thomas H. Ince (IMP US 1911) cas.: Ethel Grandin, Lucille Young, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress](#) [[USW](#)].

Uncle's Visit. Dir.: Joseph Smiley, Thomas H. Ince, George Loane Tucker (IMP US 1911) cas.: George Loane Tucker, Ethel Grandin, William Robert Daly, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library and Archives Canada](#) [[CAO](#)].

Blazing the Trail. Dir.: Thomas Ince (101 BisonUS 1912) cas.: Ethel Grandin, Ray Myers, si, b&w, 16mm, 1 reel of 1. Archive: [George Eastman Museum](#) [[USR](#)], [Museum of Modern Art](#) [[USM](#)], [Library and Archives Canada](#) [[CAO](#)], [Cineteca del Friuli](#) [[ITG](#)].

Blood Will Tell. Dir.: Thomas Ince (Kay-Bee US 1912) cas.: Ethel Grandin, Ray Myers, si, b&w, 16mm. Archive: [Deutsche Kinemathek \[DEK\]](#).

The Deserter. Dir.: Thomas Ince, (101 Bison US 1912) cas.: Francis Ford, Ethel Grandin, Winnie Baldwin, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#).

The Invaders. Dir.: Thomas Ince, Francis Ford, sc.: C. Gardner Sullivan (Kay Bee/Thomas Ince Corp. US 1912) cas.: Francis Ford, Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 16mm & 35mm. Archive: [George Eastman Museum \[USR\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [Deutsche Kinemathek \[DEK\]](#).

Texas Kelly at Bay. Dir.: Francis Ford (Kay-Bee US 1912) cas.: Francis Ford, Grace Cunard, Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#).

The Vengeance of Fate. Dir.: Thomas Ince (101 Bison US 1912) cas.: Charles K. French, Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

War on the Plains. Dir., Thomas Ince (101 Bison, US 1912) cas.: Francis Ford, Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#).

The Bachelor Girl's Club. Dir./sc.: Leslie T. Peacocke (Gem Motion Picture Co. US 1913) cas.: Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

Pure Gold and Dross. Dir.: ? (Rex Motion Picture Co. US 1913) cas.: Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 35mm, 1 reel. Archive: [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

Traffic in Souls. Dir.: George Loane Tucker, sc.: Walter MacNamara, George Loane Tucker (IMP US 1913) cas.: Jane Gail, Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 16mm & 35mm, 7 reels. Archive: [Cineteca del Friuli \[ITG\]](#), [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Museum of Modern Art \[USM\]](#), [UCLA Film and Television Archive \[USL\]](#), [Academy Film Archive \[USF\]](#), [BFI National Archive \[GBB\]](#), [Lobster Films \[FRL\]](#).

Wilful Peggy. (General Film Co. US 1915) cas.: Ethel Grandin, Victor De Linsky, Graham Velsey, Richard Carlyle, si, b&w, 16mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

The Crimson Stain Mystery: Dir.: T. Hayes Hunter, sc.: Albert Payson Terhune, Otto E. Goebel (Erbograph Co. US 1916) cas.: Maurice Costello, Ethel Grandin

- Chap. 2, *In the Demon's Power*, si, b&w, 35mm, reel 1 of 2. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 3, *The Broken Spell*, si, b&w, 35mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 4, *The Mysterious Disappearance*, si, b&w, 35mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#).

- Chap. 5, *The Figure in Black*, si, b&w, 35mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 6, *The Phantom Image*, si, b&w, 35mm, reel 1 of 2. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 7, *The Devil's Symphony*, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 8, *In the Shadow of Death*, si, b&w, 35mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 9, *The Haunting Spectre*, si, b&w, 35mm, reel 1 of 2. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 10, *The Infernal Fiend*, si, b&w, 35mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 11, *The Tortured Soul*, si, b&w, 35mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 12, *The Restless Spirit*, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#), [Library and Archives Canada \[CAO\]](#).
- Chap. 14, *The Bloodhound*, si b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).
- Chap. 15, *The Human Tiger*, si, b&w, 35mm, 2 reels. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

Pangs of Jealousy. (US 1913) cas.: Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 35mm. Archive: [Library of Congress \[USW\]](#).

A Tailor Made Man. Dir.: Joseph De Grasse (Charles Ray Productions US 1922) cas.: Charles Ray, Ethel Grandin, si, b&w, 9 reels, 8,469ft. Archive: [Gosfilmofond of Russia \[RUR\]](#).

B. Filmography: Non-Extant Film Titles:

1. Ethel Grandin as Actress and Producer (Grandin Films or Smallwood Film Corporation)

Sundered Ties, 1912; *The Fatal Verdict*, 1913; *The Gold Mesh Bag*, 1913; *Love Versus Law*, 1913; *The Tale of a Fish*, 1913; *The Adopted Daughter*, 1914; *The Adventures of a Girl Reporter*, 1914; *Beneath The Mask*, 1914; *Cupid Kicks a Goal*, 1915; *The Box Couch*, 1914; *Forgetting*, 1914; *Jane Eyre*, 1914; *Love's Victory*, 1914; *Miss Nobody From Nowhere*, 1914; *The Opal Ring*, 1914; *Papa's Darling*, 1914; *Temper Versus Temper*, 1914; *Where There's a Will There's a Way*, 1914; *The Burglar and the Mouse*, 1915; *The Dawn of Romance*, 1915; *His Doll Wife*, 1915; *Her Secret*, 1915; *The Social Law*, 1915; *A Woman's Mistake*, 1915; *The Mysterious Visitor*, 1915, *The Fashion Shop*,

1915; *The Village Outcast*, 1915; *Price of Ambition*, 1915 *Garments of Truth*, 1921; *The Hunch*, 1921.

D. Streamed Media:

[Traffic in Souls](#) (1913) is streaming online via Kanopy

Citation

Askari, Kaveh. "Ethel Grandin." In Jane Gaines, Radha Vatsal, and Monica Dall'Asta, eds. *Women Film Pioneers Project*. New York, NY: Columbia University Libraries, 2013.
<<https://wfpp-test.cul.columbia.edu/pioneer/ccp-ethel-grandin/>>